

The Island Farm
Bridgewater Township
Near Bound Brook, Somerset County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-525

HABS
NJ
18-BOUB.V
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

HABS
N.J.
18-BOUB.V.
4-

The Island Farm
Bridgewater Township
Near Bound Brook, Somerset County, New Jersey

Owner: Union Construction Holding Company

Date of Erection: About 1795

Architect:

Builder: (Probable) George Smock

Present Condition: Fair

Number of Stories: Two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - frame
construction

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - gambrel on older
portion, pitch on recent
addition

Historical Data:

In 1684 Archibald Campbell purchased eight hundred and seventy-seven acres west of Bound Brook and built a house in the vicinity of the house of our survey which was called Kell's Hall. We are not certain who was the next owner of this tract of land, but we know that in 1759 it was the property of Cornelius Van Horn and was called Island Farm by which name it is still known. It is also mentioned as being owned by Van Horn in the survey of Old York Road in 1764.

The first deed on record in Somerset County belongs to the year 1793 when Nicholas Perrine and wife sold Island Farm to George Smock. In this deed we are told that Nicholas Perrine received the property from Peter Perrine who had purchased it from Jacob Ricketts. Ricketts through his attorney John Chotwood acquired the property at sheriff sale; it is described as part of the real estate formerly of Cornelius Van Horn. We believe from the construction that this present house was built by George Smock shortly after this purchase.

George⁵ Smock was the son of John⁴ and Elizabeth Smock. He was born in Monmouth County in 1754 and married Sara Covenhoven of the same county in 1779. She died in March 1794 and he married Margaret Van Deventer in November of that same year. She was the daughter of Jacob and Sara (nee Brokaw) Van Deventer. George Smock as noted above obtained possession in 1793; before this date he had been a resident of Monmouth County. He moved to Somerset County about this time. We believe that he built this house after he married his second wife. The framing of the roof shows that this hand-hewn timber had been used before because there are evidences of mortise and tenon construction.

Smock served during the Revolution in the New Jersey militia. He stayed at Island Farm until 1818 when he moved to Monmouth County where he died in 1836. Smock sold the property in 1817 to John Herbert who had possession until 1854 when he deeded the farm to James Hodge. We believe that Hodge was responsible for the addition to the house and we also believe that he modernized and generally renovated the house when he purchased it. Hodge was a man of considerable means and the owner of a great deal of land in this region.

In 1871 Hodge sold to James Cleary. The Easton and Amboy Railroad Company purchased the farm in 1873 from Cleary. They were the owners until 1891 when they sold off part of it to the Port Reading Railway Company. This company took out their right-of-way and in 1917 sold to the Somerville Water Company who

transferred title in 1937 to the Union Construction Holding Company. At present the farm has on it the Somerville Water Works.

Bibliography:

Van Sickle, Emogene The Old York Road and Its Stage Coach Days Flemington, Hunterdon County Democrat, 1936

Smock, John C. Genealogical Notes on the Smock Family in the United States Albany, Frederick S. Hills, 1922

Snell, J. P. History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey Philadelphia, Everts and Peck, 1881

Walter E. Rutt
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer

A D D E N D U M

Further researches require the following revisions and additions to the previous account.*

The site on which now stands the house here surveyed is found to be the same on which stood as early as 1722 the homestead of Cornelius Van Horne's once famed 1400 acre "Kells Hall" plantation, a highland above the left bank of the Raritan River opposite the junction of the tributary Millstone River. The name "Island Farm" applied to this part of the original estate which appears in a deed of 1856 and on a property map of Somerset County printed in 1860 is obviously derived from the fact of frequent flooding of the lowland meadows which surround this highland on which the house and barns are situated. Anciently the York Road followed the course of the river more closely than does the straight Easton turnpike which replaced it between Bound Brook and Somerville, so that access from that highway to the house is now made over a cinder lane nearly a mile long.

The design and details of this timber framed house, the most impressive in dimensions of any of the historic ones in the region, identify its erection in the post-Revolution period. The 265 acres river front tract on which the house was built was the homestead part of the original 1400

*The documentary evidence now presented shows that the accounts of this house as published in Van Sickle's "The Old York Road" and in Bailey's "Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses" were written in ignorance of the facts.

acre estate of Cornelius Van Horne which was sold entire to Jacob Ricketts of Elizabethtown by deed of 9 February 1786*, and this part subsequently passed to Peter Perrine who in turn transferred it to Nicholas Perrine who lived in Bridgewater Township, Somerset County, in which it is situated.

This Nicholas Perrine, born 22 October 1751, baptized in the Reformed Dutch Church of Raritan** which then stood on the same bank of the Raritan River about a mile above this "Island Farm" house; he died 5 October 1811 in this township and is buried in the Presbyterian Church yard at Bound Brook, some two miles down the Raritan from this house. He married 19 November 1775 Catherine Van Horn of Curacao, West Indies, who was born 30 May 1758 and died 16 June 1798*** apparently a relative of the Cornelius Van Horne, original owner of this estate. Either Nicholas Perrine or George Smock (then of Monmouth County) to whom he conveyed the 265 acres of land "with the buildings" by a recorded deed of 1st May 1793 for 2400 pounds# "money of New York State" erected this house, they being the two successive owners of the land in its

*Recited in Deed of 10 March 1786, Jacob Ricketts to Skinner et al., recorded in Somerset Deed Book E., p. 9; and in one of 1 May 1793, N. Perrine to G. Smock, recorded in Book E., p. 85

**Register of R.D. Ch. of Raritan, publ. in Somerset Co. Hist. Quarterly, vol. 3, "1751 Nov. 24 - Preyn, Piter & Eva - Necklaes"

***See "Daniel Perrin the Huguenot and His Descendants in America, 1665-1900" by Howland D. Perrin published 1910, p. 66

#About \$6500. This price compared with that which the place brought in 1817 would indicate subsequent erection of the house by Smock.

period of architecture and of record as actual residents in the township. Smock resided in the house until he conveyed the farm by deed of 20 February 1817 to John Herbert of Monmouth County for \$22,000. (Somerset County Deed Books E-85 and I-870).

George Smock, born 24 November 1754 near Holmdel, Monmouth County, son of John and Elizabeth (Covenhoven) Smock, married firstly 4 May 1779, Sarah Covenhoven of Middletown, in the same county, who died 30 March 1784 in Bridgewater Township, Somerset County, at "Island Farm" to which the family had recently removed, and he married, secondly, 27 November 1794, Margaret Van Deventer of Bound Brook. Having sold "Island Farm" in 1817 as stated, George Smock and his family returned to his native place in Monmouth County where he died 5 June 1836 aged 81-6-11 and was buried in the family cemetery near Holmdel.*

HISTORY OF THE "KELLS HALL" PLANTATION**

Inasmuch as this "Island Farm" house apparently was erected near the site of, if not on part of, the foundations of, the original "Kells Hall" of Cornelius Van Horne mentioned above, some record of that 1400 acre estate is here presented as the result of researches in contemporary public archives. The advertisement of the public sale of the estate of Cornelius Van Horne, deceased, in the New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury of September 5, 1774, describes it as "the farm or plantation whereon the said Cornelius Van

*See "Genealogical Notes on the Smock Family in the United States" by John C. Smock, publ. 1922, p. 27

**The name appears as "Kells Hall Plantation" in a deed of 5 February 1774. It is not to be confused with "Phil's Hill" plantation (NJ-523), adjacent on the East, the seat of Col. Philip Van Horne.

Van Horne lately lived, lying and being on Raritan River, in the County of Somerset and province of East New Jersey containing by estimation about 1400 acres of land, whereon is a large brick dwelling house, orchards, grist mill, smelting house, barns, stables and sundry out-houses" etc. * Evidently this manor house of brick which appears on record in a survey map** of 1722 was destroyed between this date 5 September 1774 and 1 May 1793 when George Smook purchased the 265 acre tract on which it had stood. The timber frame house which he occupied there bears all the marks of the later date.

By a deed of 20 November 1722, Cornelius Van Horne of New York City, merchant, and wife Elizabeth agreed with Joseph Reade of the same city, merchant, and wife Anne, upon partition of the 2754 acres held in common as surveyed by "Alexander Mackdowell with the assistance of Mr. Michael Vanvagten and Mr. John Brokar in the presence of Mr. Adolph Phillips and Phillip French, men elected by their mutual assents for that purpose and laid out in four lots which doth more distinctly appear by a copy of the Survey annexed to these Presents." (See tracing herewith)

This deed recites that the Lords Proprietors of the Province of East New Jersey by indenture of 28 February 1683 granted to Thomas Codrington of New York City, merchant, 877 acres "at or near a place called the Raraton upon the North side of Raraton River in the County of Middlesex" (which then included the area of Somerset) bounded South by the Raritan River, west by the land of Captain John Palmer, north by the "common hills", east by lands of Mr. John Royse, and that the said proprietors by indenture of same date granted to John Royse of New York City, merchant, also 877 acres bounded south by Raritan River, west by the (abovesaid) lands of Mr. Thomas Codrington, north by the hills, and east by land laid out for the proprietors.

*See "New Jersey Archives" 1st series, Vol. 29, p. 470

**See tracing of map herewith

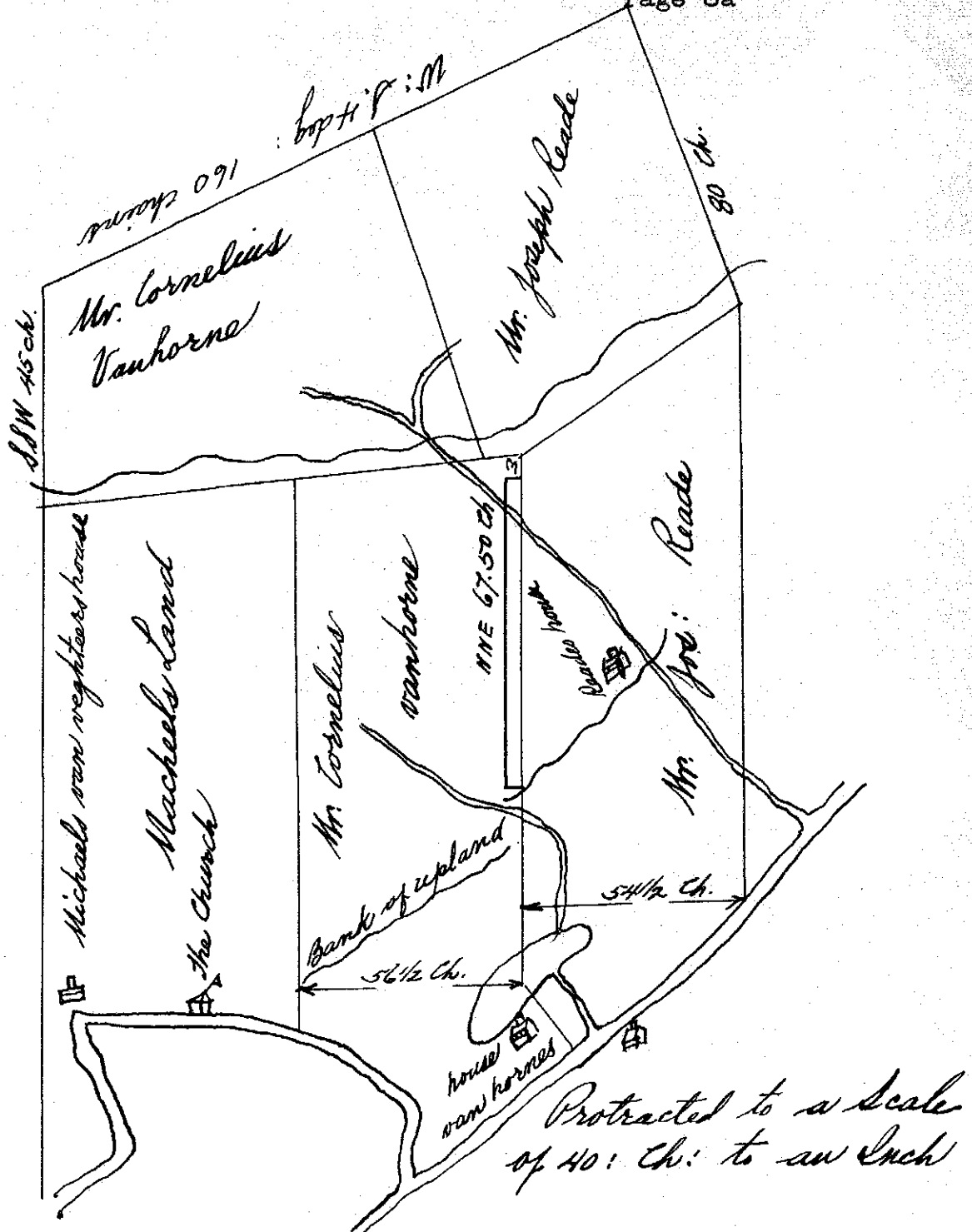
Further recital, that the said John Royse by indenture of 30 August 1685 conveyed to the said "Captain Thomas Codrington of Raritan River" all the aforesaid tract sold to grantor by the Lords Proprietors as above.

And that the said proprietors by indenture of 14 May 1688 granted further to the said Thomas Codrington of Raritan, "all that one other part of land at the rear of his own land", containing 1000 acres, beginning "at the foot of the Blew Hills" at the northeast corner of the land which he purchased of said John Royse, thence north over the hills 80 chains "which is one mile" thence west 4° south 160 chains, thence southwest 45 chains to the northwest corner of the land which said Codrington purchased of Captain Palmer, thence at the rear of all his land to place of beginning. Which three tracts lying contiguous to each other were formerly in the actual seizure of the said Codrington, amounting to 2754 acres.

And that the said Codrington and wife Margaret by indenture of 8 May 1706 granted unto Philip French of New York City, merchant, deceased, all the three tracts aforesaid, "with all and singular the houses, out-houses, edifices, buildings, barns, stables, warehouses, landings" etc.

And that the said Philip French by his last will* dated 29 May 1706 devised unto his three daughters Elizabeth, Anne and Margaret all his said land or real estate at Raritan River with remainder to the survivor of any who died under age or unmarried.

*The will of Phillip French of N. Y., Mercht., 20 May 1706, pr. 3 June 1707, also devises inter al., 5 pounds for the poor of the Parish of Kellshall in England. (Abstract of will publ. in collections N.Y.H.S.. vol. 25, p. 442). Evidently his daughter, Elizabeth Van Horne called her portion of his estate "Kells Hall" in honor of his previous association with the Parish of that name.



Tracing of diagram recorded with the Deed of 20 Nov. 1722 in book D-2, page 14 (now in office of Sec. of State) by which Cornelius Van Horne and Joseph Reade partitioned the 2754 acre tract in Bridgewater Twp., Somerset Co., N.J., of Philip French of N.Y.C., decd., their father-in-law. The site of the house indicated hereon as Van Hornes became later that of "Island Farm" house (NJ-525) and that of Reade's became "Phil's Hall" (NJ-523). The pond and Cuckolds Brook appear behind Van Horne's house and the Middlebrook beside Reade's is shown coming through the mountain at the gap now called Chimney Rock, with Raritan River the lower boundary of the estate.

The said Margaret, the youngest, died before 18 years of age and marriage, and Elizabeth the eldest daughter married Cornelius Van Horne aforesaid, and the second daughter Anne married Joseph Reade aforesaid, so that the said Van Horne and Reade in right of their wives became jointly seized each of one share of all the said three tracts amounting to 2754 acres. (Recorded in Liber D-2, pages 7-13, incl., East New Jersey Records, now deposited in office of the Secretary of State).

Cornelius Van Horne who thus obtained the western half of the 2754 acre estate on the Raritan River, was born in New York City and baptized there on 17 Dec. 1693. He married there 13 July 1718 Elizabeth French daughter of Philip French, became a wealthy merchant there and as early as 4 March 1722 appears as "one of His Majesty's Justices of Ye Peace for Ye County of Somerset", when he owned the Kells Hall plantation there since 1707 in right of his wife as above described. Having been recommended by his relative, Governor Burnet of New Jersey, Cornelius Van Horne became a member of the Legislative Council of that Province under the Royal appointment. In 1736 he was appointed mayor of New York City, but did not serve; in 1740 he was appointed to the Commission on the boundaries between the Provinces of Massachusetts Bay and Rhode Island.

"Cornelius Van Horne of the County of Somerset in the eastern division of the Province of New Jersey, gentleman", died between 19 February 1768 and 23 May 1770, the dates of signing and of probate of his Will in which he devised all his real and personal estate to his wife Elizabeth Van Horne during her lifetime, with power to sell part or the whole thereof, and after her decease the eastern half of "the farm and Plantation whereon I now live situated in Somerset County aforesaid which said whole farm as appears by a map made on an actual survey thereof by Benjamin Morgan and hereunto annexed contains something more than 1102 acres," is devised to son Philip Van Horne and the western half to son John Van Horne (reserving the grist mill and six

acres about it to son Philip), with reversion in case they predeceased him to their issue, and appoints the wife Elizabeth Van Horne as sole executrix.

In the inventory of the personal estate of Cornelius Van Horne, deceased, dated 9 September 1771 and filed with the will is a note that the executrix Elizabeth Van Horne, had lately become blind. Whether she was in fact the widow, of same name, whose marriage to James Rivington of New York City was reported in the New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury of 20 March 1769* seems contradicted by this and by a deed of 5 February 1774 in which "Elizabeth Van Horne, executrix" of the will of Cornelius Van Horne late of Bridgewater township, Somerset County, New Jersey, deed, conveys to Philip Van Horne of same place and Edward Foy of New York City for 3000 pounds, the tract "commonly called the Mountain Lott" part of the estate of said Van Horne, deceased, in said township, containing 800 acres, bounded east by the mountain land which Thomas Mc Ilwraith purchased from Joseph Reade then merchant of New York, but since deceased, north by lands of the Earl of Stirling, west part by the lands of Richard Compton and part by the plantation now in possession of Archibald Campbell purchased from said Cornelius Van Horne in his lifetime, and south part by the rear of Derick Van Veighen's land and part by the rear of "Kells Hall Plantation commonly so called" reserving thereout the grist mill and its six acres devised to said Philip Van Horne by the will of his father Cornelius Van Horne deceased. (Recorded in Liber H-3, p. 236, of East New Jersey records, now deposited in office of Secretary of State).

*See Somerset County Historical Quarterly, Vol. 7, p. 228

Elizabeth Van Horne, widow of Cornelius, and John Van Horne, their younger son continued to reside in "Kelle Hall" after his death, but the estate proving insolvent, she as executrix conveyed by deed of 26 February 1774 the plantation in trust to Charles M'Evers and Augustus Van Cortlandt to sell the same for the benefit of the creditors.* These trustees advertised the estate for sale in Rivingtons New York Gazette of April 7, 1774. But judgments against the estate had been obtained meanwhile and the sheriff of Somerset County seized the plantation and advertised it for public sale to be held on November 1, 1774 on the premises** describing it as containing about 1400 acres whereon is "a large brick dwelling house, orchards, grist mill, smelting house, barns, stablee, and sundry outhouses." The 1400 acre "Kells Hall" estate was divided into 14 lots in a map of them made in February 1786 by Benjamin Morgan. By deed of 9 February 1786, William McDonald, Esq., High Sheriff of the County of Somerset, conveyed the entire tract to Jacob Rickets of Elizabethtown, N. J., as recited in deed recorded in Book E, page 9, in office of County Clerk, Somerville.

Architectural Analysis:

The dimensions and the formal plan of this mansion house effectively situated on a rising headland overlooking the Raritan, combine to create the most successful example of a pretentious residence in this locality. In the success of its proportions alone it surpasses the neighboring and more famous historically "Phil's Hill" mansion (NJ-523) which is similar in design.

*See notice dated 30 January 1775, pub. in the N.Y. Gazette reprinted in New Jersey Archives, Vol. 31, p. 51 and Vol. 29, p. 332

**See the N. Y. Gazette and Weekly Mercury 5 Sept. 1774 reprinted in N.J. Archives Vol. 29, p. 476

The floor plan composed of a wide stair-hall from front to rear entrances, with a pair of principal apartments on each side, and the two chimneys in each gable end, mark this house as definitely of late 18th century erection. The details of woodwork confirm this assignment of date but certain of them, the mantel in the "study" and the trim of the windows in the chamber marked "living room" on sheet No. 2, being obviously of later style must be noted as subsequent replacements. This later remark applies to the double doors between each pair of rooms there, the panelling therein being common to work in 1850, as is the entire railing of the stairs, the entrance doors, and the north front porch. The most important alteration appears in the eaves; the existing over-hand being obviously a replacement of a box cornice. The original freize appears to remain there at the eaves, however, and that on the south front bears clearly the marks of applied modillion brackets since removed, a further evidence for the original box cornice. The freize of the north front is ornamented now with the interlaced wood "strapwork" applied in the fashion of early 19th century. Marks in the paint on the original beaded clapboards indicate former existence of a pilaster having been set there, on each side of the doorway probably as part of a portico to the front and the rear entrances. The present portico to the north entrance accordingly is shown to be a later replacement.

Since the site on which this "Island Farm" house has stood since its erection about 1793 is found earlier to have been that of "Kells Hall" which latter house was described in 1774 as a large brick dwelling; it is of interest to discover certain existing features which indicate that the first named was built on part of the foundations remaining from the destruction of the earlier house. For, the present basement is divided into four rooms by brick walls on which bear the timber joists of the first floor, and the largest of these rooms is floored with bricks 8 x 13 inches face. Very remarkable is the great arched brick feature in the northeast room, obviously the support for a fireplace above, and abutting its rear, in the southeast room,

a corner fireplace. Neither of these features bears any relation to the fireplace in the corresponding two rooms above (compare sheets 1 and 2) the flue from that corner fireplace being crudely brought up in an elbow form over the floor in the closet to connect with the independent chimney in the room marked "study", clearly an adaptation of existing conditions to new work. This unusual amount of brickwork in the basement, and even as partition walls in the first and second stories, (a unique usage) may be material salvaged from the earlier house which was destroyed between 1774 and 1795.

Bibliography:

East New Jersey Deed Book D-2, pp. 7-14

Somerset County Deed Books E, p. 85 and
I p. 870

Survey drawings and photographs and
personal inspection.

Lewis R. Cook
Supervising Historian